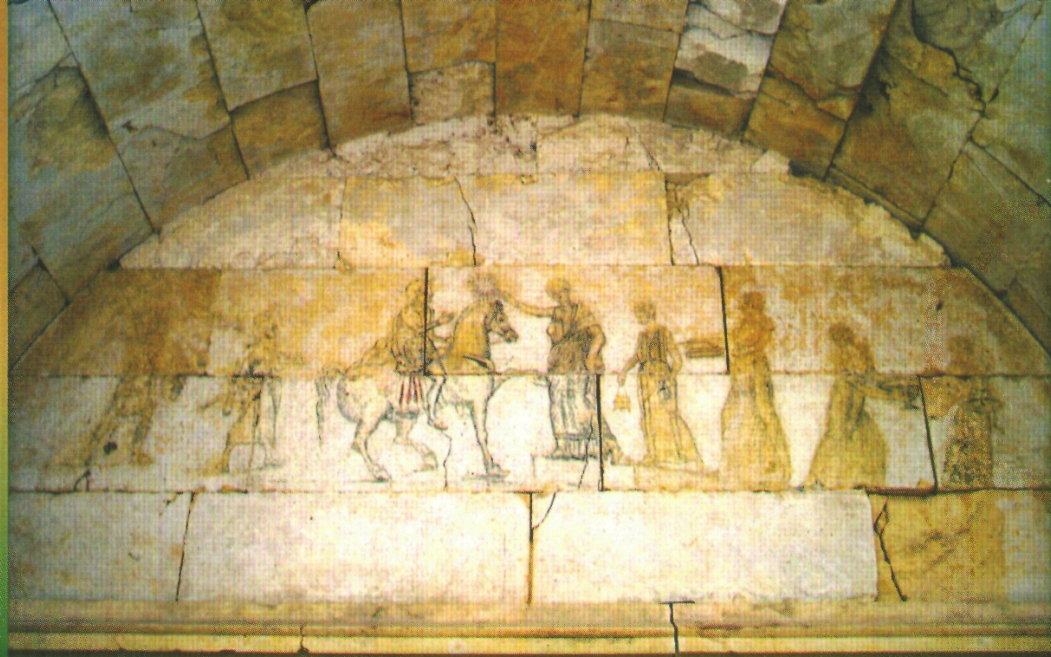
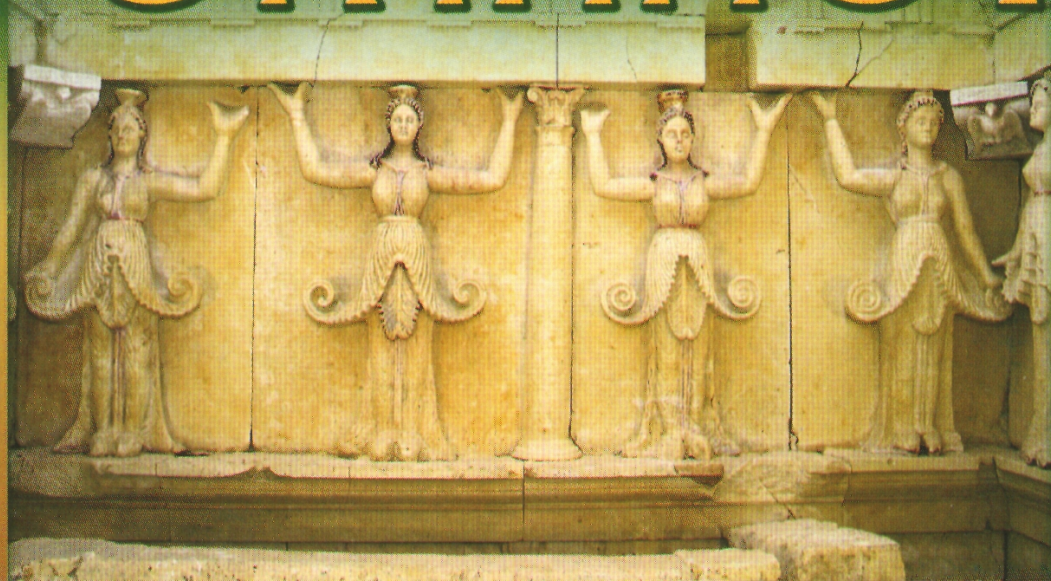




THE UNKNOWN LAND SBORYANOV



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THE UNKNOWN LAND
SBORYANOVO

« КЛАСИКА

THE RESERVE



'After Dobruja there comes the Deliorman area, called thus for the large and tall forests that cover it', wrote in 1595 Pavel Jorjich, a merchant from Dubrovnik. Actually, the Polish traveller Otvinovski was the first to mention the name Deliorman in 1557 though he wrongly gave its location in South Bulgaria, beyond the Balkan Range. A few centu-



ries earlier the Ottoman invaders, surprised and amazed by the majestic forests of the Northeast gave the place the name 'Forest Sea' (Agach Denizi).

Today's geography locates the Ludogorie (Wild Forest) area between the Dobruja Plateau in the north and northeast, the Eliyata (the Danube riverside) in the northwest and the river-valleys of the Beli Lom and Pomoriiska to the south and southwest. Nowadays the Ludogorie is one of the important farming areas of Bulgaria and the modern

landscape has little to do with the 'Forest Sea' of the past. There are still a few enclaves that have preserved not only the nature of bygone times but also vestiges of the life of many tribes and peoples that lived here millennia ago.

According to paleogeographic research the Sboryanovo Historical-Archaeological Reserve is one of those rare and fortunate incidences where archaeological monuments exist in an environment that has changed little since the time they were created. It is a unique complex comprising settlements, temples and burial grounds dating far back in history and a nature that has preserved some rare plant and animal species. The Reserve lies in the western part of the Ludogorie plateau, along the Krapinets River and between the villages of Malak Porovets and Sveshtari of Isperih region.

The river Krapinets canyon cuts deep into the spurs of Isperih hills; in places it has denuded almost vertical sedimentary rocks of cretaceous limestone topped by characteristic stone crowns. It is those picturesque rocks and the loess stratum over them that cause the aridity of the West Ludogorie. The rivers running through it lose their water and never reach the Danube. During heavy rains the wild water swells to the very edge of the narrow gullies only to disappear quickly into the thousands of karst crevices in the rocks and leave behind slime and rubble. Archaeological research has proved that the Krapinets river valley has suffered the destructive force of floods since pre-historic times. Sediments point to a 20-25-year cycle and a much greater force of the water, as the river was deeper then and flowed into the Danube. Even in those far-off times as today, the only source of drinking water for kilometers around were the karst springs at Demir Baba Teke, honoured as a source of health and life.

Time and the sporadic human intervention kept the specific plant life of Sboryanovo

almost intact. The permeable topsoil was favourable for the growth and preservation of a number of East-European steppe species in combination with mixed deciduous forests. Elm, ever-green oak, maple, ash, linden and hornbeam grow in the river valley. Climbing up towards the rock crown the vegetation changes – there is cornel-tree, sumac, hazelbush, danewort and hawthorn and on the very edge of the stone massif – filmy fern, white heath, thyme, foxglove and mullein. There are some plant species which do not occur anywhere else in the country.

Surrounded on all sides by arable land, the isolated area of Sboryanovo is a sanctuary and a veritable realm of birds. It is the nesting ground of buzzards and falcons, of four species of woodpeckers, nightingales, titmice, herons, bee-eaters and swallows. There are 47 species of birds, 10 of which listed in Bulgaria's Red Book and 3 – in the Red Book of Europe. Birds are not the only wild life of Sboryanovo – there are red and roe deer grazing under the trees as well as wild boars, badgers, foxes polecats, tortoises and snakes. Rodents – hamsters, field mice and the omnipresent rabbits, inhabit the fields of the Reserve.

The climate of the area is temperate continental with hot summers and cold winters, with constant winds blowing predominantly from the west and northwest. The soil is airy, well-structured, retaining moisture and warmth and therefore suitable for all kinds of crops – a fact appreciated by the early inhabitants of the area.

This extremely favourable combination of natural conditions – availability of water, fertile soil, suitable climate and rich forests as well as flat ground protected by precipitous slopes, have attracted man from deep back in history to our time.



Visitors to the Sboryanovo Historical-Archaeological Reserve will see ancient monuments, a living religious tradition and the unique nature and will no doubt be enthralled by their charm.

THE TIME OF FLINT

The earliest inhabitants of Sboryanovo appeared at the end of the New Stone Age (Late Neolith) – about 5000 years B.C. They were attracted not only by the above-mentioned auspicious natural conditions, but also by the fact that the limestone strata around

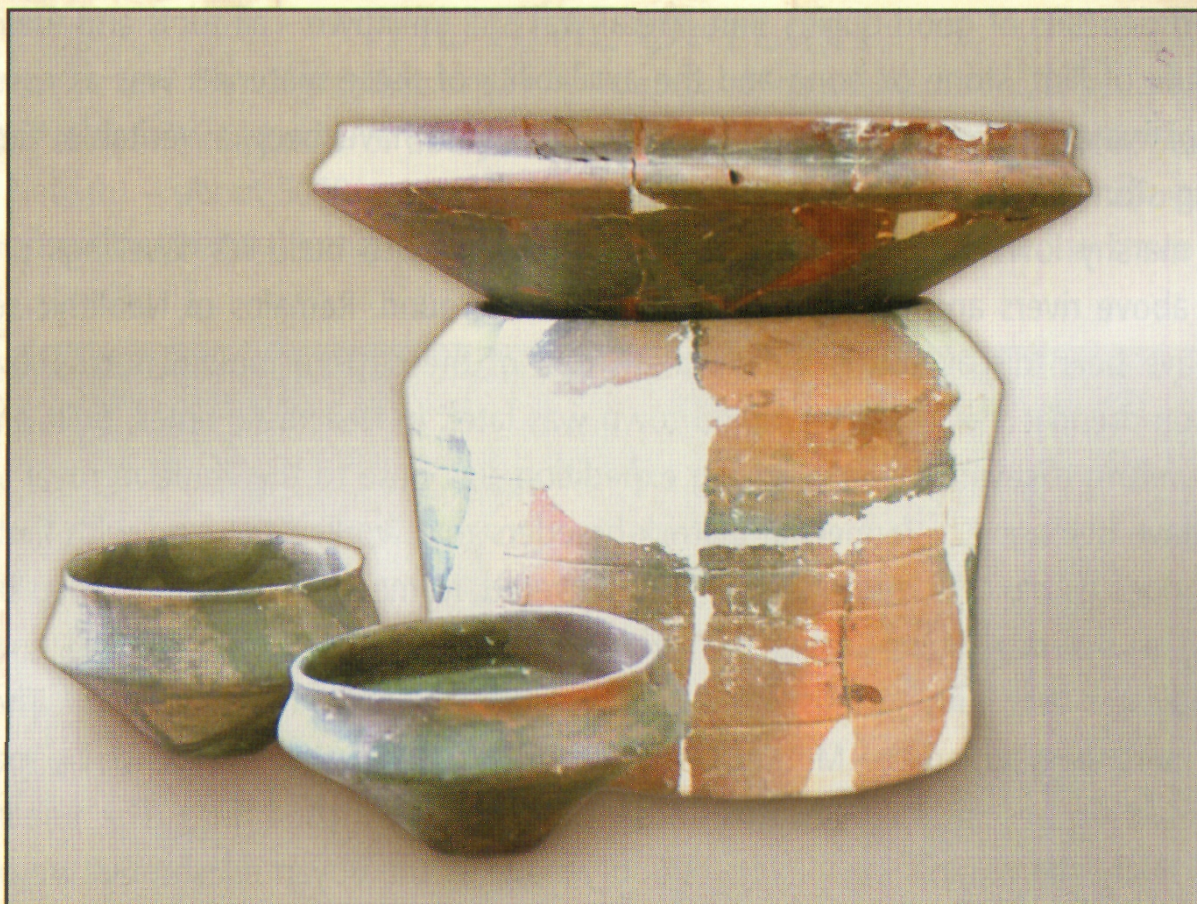


Tools from the Stone-Copper Age (the 'Nivata' site)

contained deposits of good-quality flint. Metal was still unknown - all tools and weapons were made of flint, stone or bone and the availability of these materials was as essential as that of water. In human history the Stone Age must have been a veritable 'time of gathering stones'.

The marshy lowlands and severe winters forced man to build his dwellings on the hillsides above rivers and to dig them well into the ground. Remains of Neolithic settlements have been discovered in the northern part of the eastern mound necropolis and on the sun-drenched plateau. A fortified town was later, in Hellenistic times, built on this site. A dwelling excavated after a drilling expedition, lies close to the Thracian royal tomb. It must have belonged to farmers and stock-breeders that worked the land with flint and wooden hoes as ploughing was still to be discovered. Numerous cattle and sheep bones testify to a well-developed animal husbandry. There are fewer bones of wild animals, which indicates that hunting must have been a subsidiary, not a main livelihood. The ancient farmers worshipped the Mother Goddess and expressed their reverence by making small female figures decorated with intricately interwoven incised lines. The unearthed ceramics relate the original inhabitants of Sboryanovo to the Boyan Juleshti Culture of the late Stone Age along the lower reaches of the Danube.

In later time when the marshy lands turned into fertile fields, the hill-dwellers moved down into the valley and built their settlements by the river. There are two settlements in the Sboryanovo area which were inhabited from the beginning of the Stone-Copper Age until its very end. The centuries-long presence of man on the same site produced two dwelling mounds – one in the centre of Sboryanovo and the other - 2km to the southeast, at the limit of today's village of M.Porovets. The oldest remains of these settlements



Tools and clay vessels from the Stone-Copper Age (the 'Nivata' site) belong to the early Bronze Age, known as the Polyanitsa Culture, and the articles found in the uppermost stratum – to the late period of the same age. The latter, known as the Kodjaderman-Gumelnitsa-Karanovo VI is a culture comprising a large territory, which spread from the Thracian Plain to South Romania.

The Stone-Copper Age dwelling came up onto the ground and as a rule had two rooms. One was always supplied with an oven – an indication that there was a well-

developed grain-growing farming. The clay plastered on the structure of poles contained awns and straw from wheat and barley and the household waste – cattle, sheep and goat bones.

A flint fork-pole unearthed in the dwelling mound at Demir Baba is a testimony to the fact that at that time man had already acquired the skill of ploughing the land. There are also loom and spindle weights indicating that besides by the furs of wild animals people were clad by the wool of domestic animals and hemp.

Of course hunting continued to provide food and various other materials. The thick forests were inhabited by foxes and wolves, rabbits, wild boars, red and roe deer, whose antlers were used to make handles and couplers for compound tools. As in former times people addressed their prayers for a good harvest, good health and a long life to the Mother Goddess, whose clay and bone representations in figurines were found in the dwelling mounds.

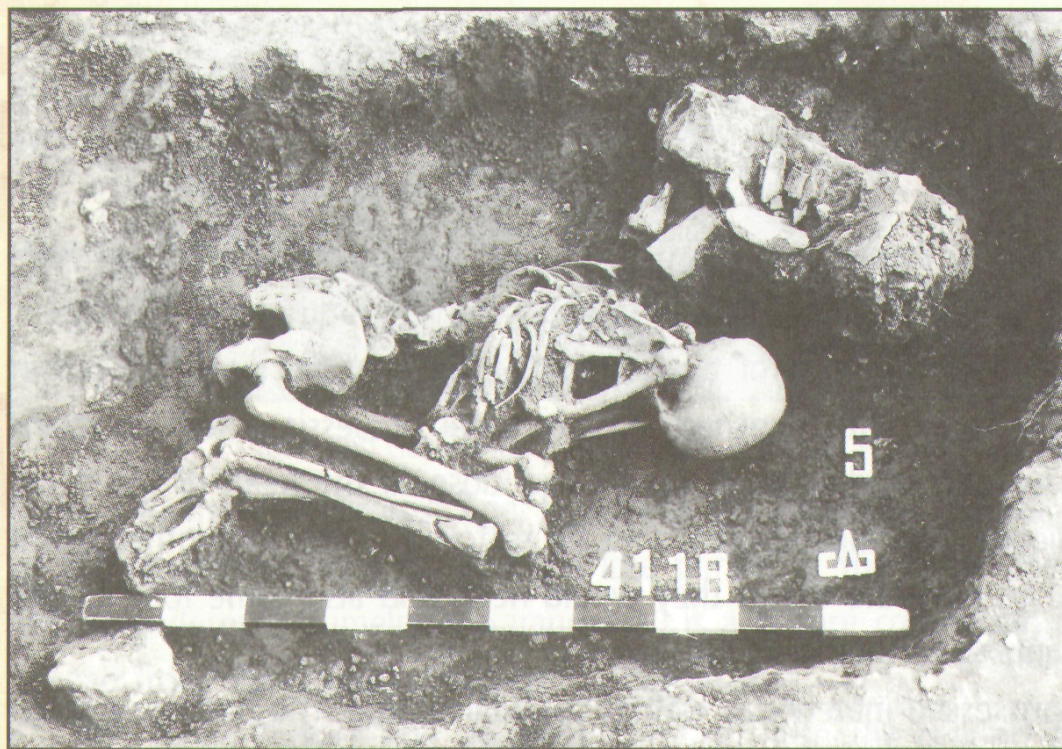
Man did not live long in those times. Hard labour, illnesses and infections at child-bearing or when wounded carried people away into the better world at an early age.

The dead were buried to the west of the settlement, beyond the river, laid out in deep graves and on one side, with hunched legs. Personal possessions and weapons were placed in the grave and food in small vessels laid close to the head of the deceased. The ancients believed that their dead would be restored to life in another world and they wanted them to have the things they would need and also some food to see them through the beginning of their new life.

The early farmers possessed material as well as spiritual culture. The pots they prepared their food in had a rough outer side, but were painstakingly polished inside to use

the heat to the maximum and not leak. There are fine thin-sided vessels polished on the inner and outer side and decorated with graphite ornaments on their black surface. In the different periods the decoration was supplemented with incised, inlaid patterns in white. The flint and stone tools such as axes, adzes, hammers, forked poles, knives for cutting meat or wood, scythes, chisels etc. are strictly specialized and have the appropriate shape. Although they lived in thick, impenetrable forests, the original inhabitants of Sboryanovo maintained contacts with far-off places – their axes were made of strong and heavy volcanic stone, which can be found in the mountains only, and the Balkan Range and the

Carpathians were closest. The only deposits of the graphite used in the ornamentation of the vessels occurred in today's Northwestern Bulgaria and the decorations and bracelets were made of spondilus shells from the coasts of the Mediterranean.



Tomb № 5 in the necropolis at Demir Baba Teke

Towards the end of the 5th millennium B.C. the climate changed for the worse, farming was hard hit and the highly developed Kojadermen-Gumelnitsa-Karanovo VI Culture declined. To make matters worse, there followed an invasion of horse-riding nomadic tribes from the steppes north



Clay idols (the 'Nivata' site)

of the Black Sea. The settlements on the mounds were gradually deserted. Some were burnt down by the invaders, others – like the one at Sboryanovo near Demir Baba Teke, having survived until the final stage of the Stone-Copper Age, were abandoned by their inhabitants in search of a better life.

THE CHILDREN OF THE SUN

At the beginning of the first millennium B.C. Sboryanovo became the site of the most significant cultural-religious and in later time political centre to be founded by the Getic tribes in the north Thracian lands. It was the beginning of the Iron Age in the Balkan Peninsula, a time of significant cultural and economic changes. The oldest and biggest sanctuary on the territory of Sboryanovo dates back to that period, as does a necropolis consisting of five low mounds.



Finds from Kamen Rid Sanctuary – early Iron Age



A vessel from Kamen Rid Sanctuary – early Iron Age

The Kamen Rid Plateau in the centre of Sboryanovo is exposed to the elements throughout the year. Three thousand years ago the thin, twenty-centimeter deep soil and scanty grass were probably non-existent. It was here, upon the bare, sun-scorched and wind-swept rock that the Getae offered sacrifices to their Sun God and performed their religious rites.

Set up at the dawn of the Iron Age, the sanctuary continued in existence for several centuries gradually acquiring its final appearance. It occupies an area of about 12 acres, surrounded by stone walls, which nowadays stand at a height of 1 meter. The only en-



Finds from Kamen Rid Sanctuary – early Iron Age



trance into the sanctuary is from the south where the remains of its oldest wall can be identified. Close to the wall there were numerous fireplaces built on the bare rock. Pits dug in the stone contained offerings of beautiful dishes, spindle weights and mysterious small amulets and idols made of clay, used to propitiate the gods. The excavated bones of a baby and fragments of a skull give sufficient ground to believe that human sacrifices were probably part of the religious practices of the Getae..

Two large stone circles in the northwestern part of the site mark the places where the holy rituals were

performed. There is a large sacrificial stone built into one of the circles. The archaeological complex bears all the features characteristic of the Mediterranean sanctuaries; there are no defence fortifications, walls are designed to surround only and the entrance is from the south.



A few centuries later [4th century B.C.] another sanctuary was built in the deep, shadowy hollow at the foot of Kamen Rid, just next to the ever-flowing spring in the very heart of the Reserve. It was dedicated to the underground deities, to water and good



health and continued in existence until the beginning of the New Era. Together with the older sanctuary on Kamen Rid Plateau they probably formed a religious complex devoted to the Mother Goddess and her divine partner.

Enormous stones stood prominent in the original design and were afterwards built

into the foundations of Demir Baba Tomb. To this day visitors stretch out on the stones in the belief that they will acquire strength and good health. The stone blocks probably shaped an arched narrow passage, a solemn entrance into after-life. A spiral of steep steps hewn in the northern wall leads upwards evoking the vision of a Getic priest climbing up on ceremonial occasions.

A sacrificial altar is

Rock massif —
part of the Thracian sanctuary
(4th —1st centuries A.D.)
built into Demir Baba Tomb



still standing at the entrance to the inner courtyard of Demir Baba Teke. The grooves in the rock keep the memory of water, wine or blood offerings that ran into a deep clay receptacle dug in the rock base.

Ancient cults required closed premises for the execution of the sacred rites and for communicating with the divinities. A crude structure, dug deep in the ground can be seen between the sacrificial stone and the rock massif with the hewn in steps. At both ends of this structure there are quadrangular platforms for the sacrifices and two round altars (1m in diameter) in the centre, part of a sphere surrounded by a wide stone band.

The complex has also a pool built of large stone blocks and fed by the powerful karst spring.

The entire area of the sanctuary is separated from its surroundings by means of a sacred wall built of large stone blocks bearing the typical features of the Thracian construction techniques.

In Hellenistic times the sanctuary became part of the nearby Getic capital to which it was linked by a well-maintained protected road cut in the rocks. Thus in times of war the town did not suffer from lack of water and the holy place was well guarded.

The sanctuary at the springs of Demir Baba Teke outlived the one at Kamen Rid and the capital of the Getic State. It survived until the beginning of the New Era and the ancient traditions of the holy place have not faded away to this day.

THE CITY OF THE VICTORS

In the last quarter of the 4th century B.C., when Lysimachos was fighting to establish his rule over Northeastern Thrace, the Getic rulers built a fortified settlement on this site supposed to be the political, economic and military centre of the area.



Part of the southern fortress wall and the southern gate



The acropolis of the city spread over an area of 25 acres on the comparatively level plateau, surrounded on three sides by the deep canyon of the Krapinets river in the centre of Sbo-ryanovo and had remarkable fortifications. The only directly accessible place is a narrow neck in the southwest. The outer surrounding wall follows the outline of the terrain and is

3.50 – 4.2 m thick, 1,400m long and was probably 10-12 m high. The two main entrances into the fortress – the northern and southern gates – were protected by means of an intricate system of walls and bastions. The width of the walls allowed the movement of large groups of warriors and even their regrouping at any point.

The fortified area was a crowded place full of dwellings, farm and other buildings in the tradition of the East – wooden structures plastered with a thick layer of clay. But excavations uncovered some monumental buildings, too, designed in the tradition of ancient Greece.

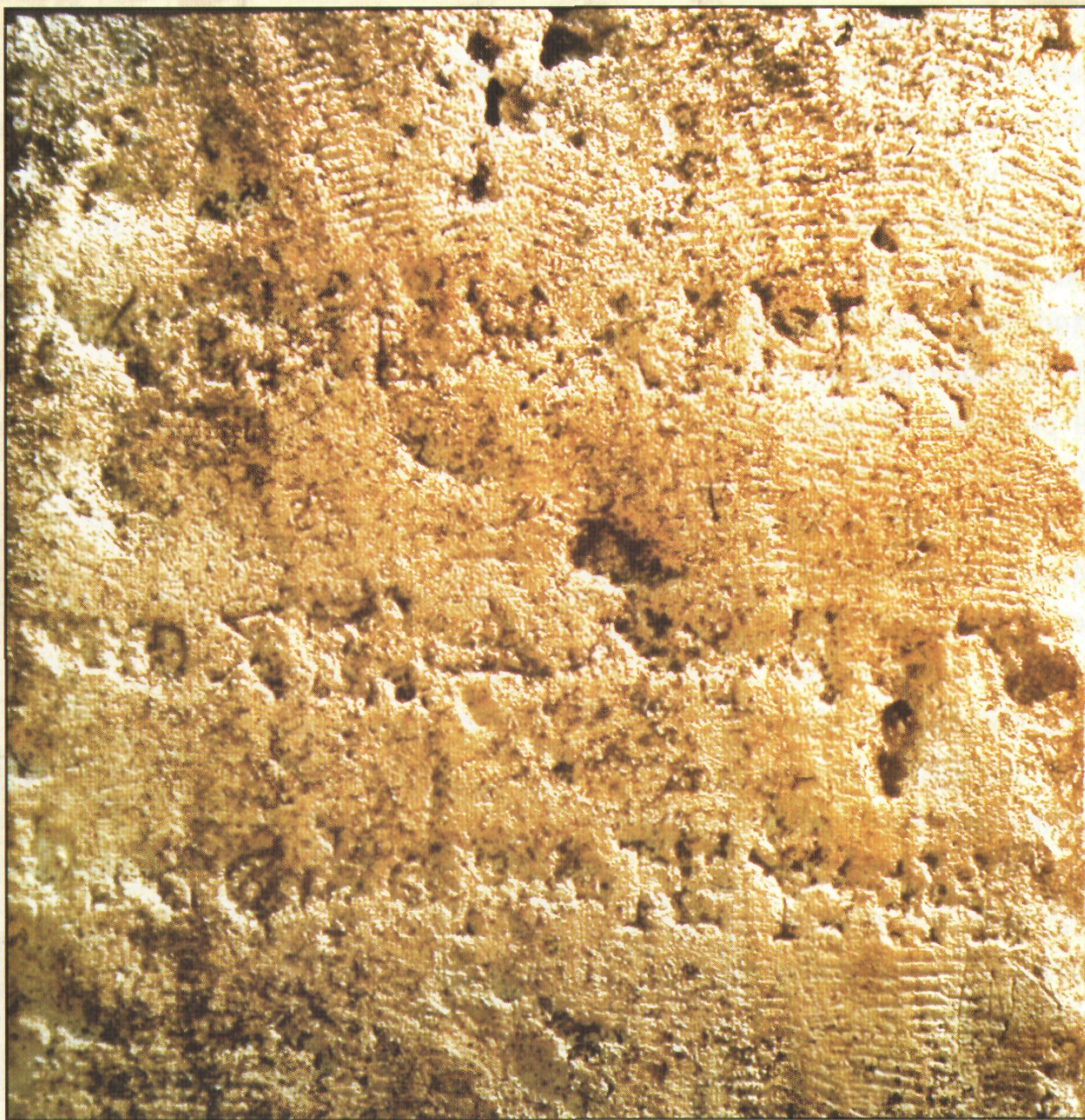
Not all the inhabitants lived within the fortress walls. During archaeological drilling

to the north of Demir Baba Sanctuary and near Dipsiz Göl (Bottomless Lake) there were discovered the remains of a residential district. Most probably it was here that the landing stage was for the goods transported through the then navigable Krapets River to and from the Danube and the Black Sea ports. The excavated amphorae, Greek utensils and other articles testify to the intensive trade links between the Getae and the Greek city-colonies along the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. The quantity and variety of the imported goods can be established by the shape of the amphorae and their seals. Although the major part of the amphorae came from Thasos (about 70%), the total number of the producers of goods transported in amphorae was over 20 – impressive trading contacts for that time.

The significance of the city as a political, economic and cultural centre is attested by the excavated coins and remains of luxury goods imported from the Black Sea and Asia Minor cities: black polished ceramics, combs and decorations. The import in amphorae, most probably of great quantities of wine and olive oil suppose a reciprocal export. The fertile soil and the improved farming tools indicate that



Remains of streets and dwellings



Dedicatory inscription discovered at the southern gate into the fortress

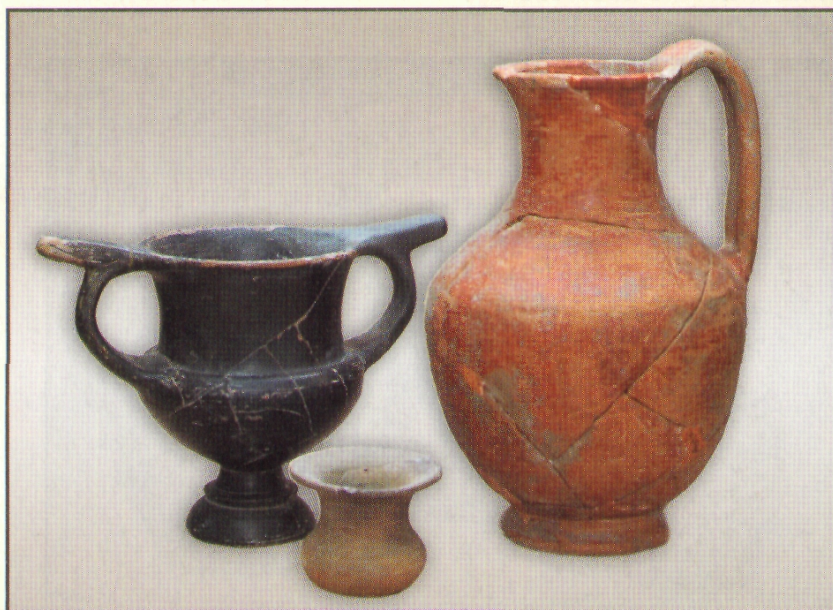
a major part of the export consisted of farm produce – grain, cattle, furs etc., but the city was also a flourishing craft centre. There have been found remains of workshops, a big collection of tools, production materials and waste which testify to a well-developed metal-working, jewellery making, pottery, manufacturing of bone articles...

The ties between the city and the Hellenistic world are confirmed by an epigraphic inscription in Hellenic, dedicated to the Goddess Phosphorus, patron of gateways and fortresses. The donor, a Menecharmos, son of Posedonii, was undoubtedly a Hellene from a Black Sea city-colony.

So far there has been discovered no other settlement in the



Finds from the excavations at the Thracian fortified city
(4th –2nd centuries B.C.)





Finds from the excavations at the Thracian fortified city
(4th – 2nd centuries B.C.)



whole of the tribal territory of the Getae that can compete with the city at Sboryanovo in size, solidity of the fortification system and economic achievement. Nor sanctuaries of such age, so greatly honoured or necropolises with such rich tombs. The only Getic city mentioned by the ancient historians is Hellis – the capital of the Getic ruler Dromihed – where, when captured, Lysimachos and his army were taken.

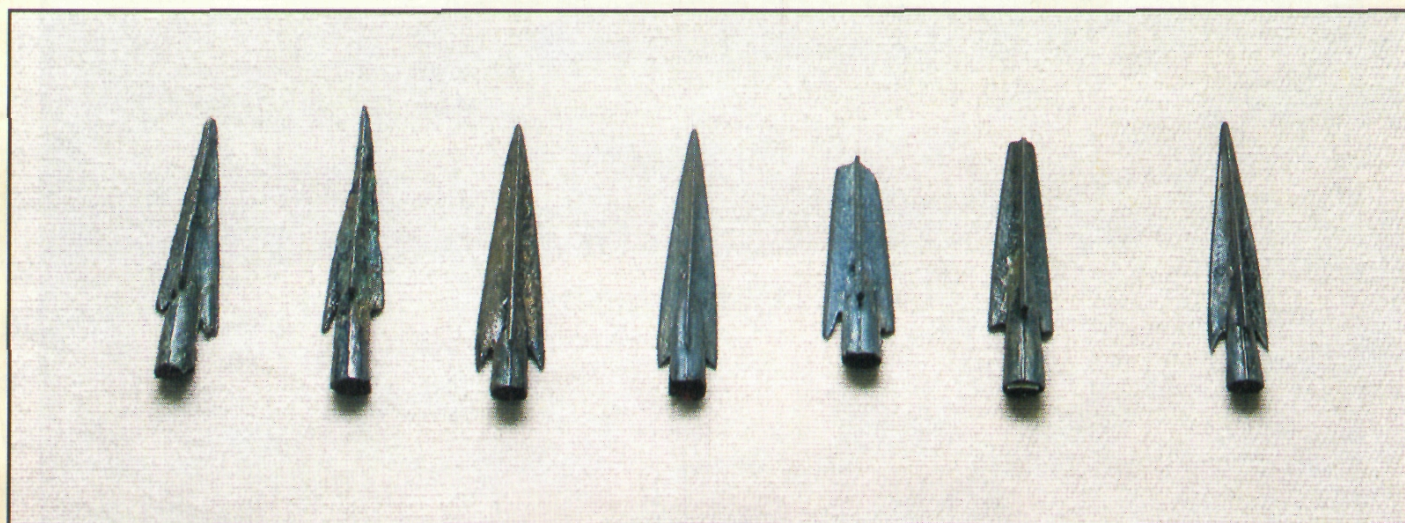
Drohimed's capital perished in a devastating earthquake in the middle of the 3rd century – about 250 years before Christ, at the peak of its economic and cultural development. Life in the city was not resumed and its name soon disappeared from the ancient annals.

Archaeological excavations brought back from oblivion the most remarkable Thracian city in the



North – the city of the victors over Lysimachos. It was not just the stronghold of the warlike Getae, but the most prosperous trade, craft and cultural centre in these lands in antiquity.

Finds from the excavations at the Thracian fortified city (4th-2nd centuries B.C.)



BEYOND DEATH

To the east and west of the fortified city, on both sides of the Krapinets Canyon there are the two large necropolises of Sboryanovo. Each measures 2km in length. Local history scholars claim that this area is the site of the 'Hundred Mounds' frequently mentioned



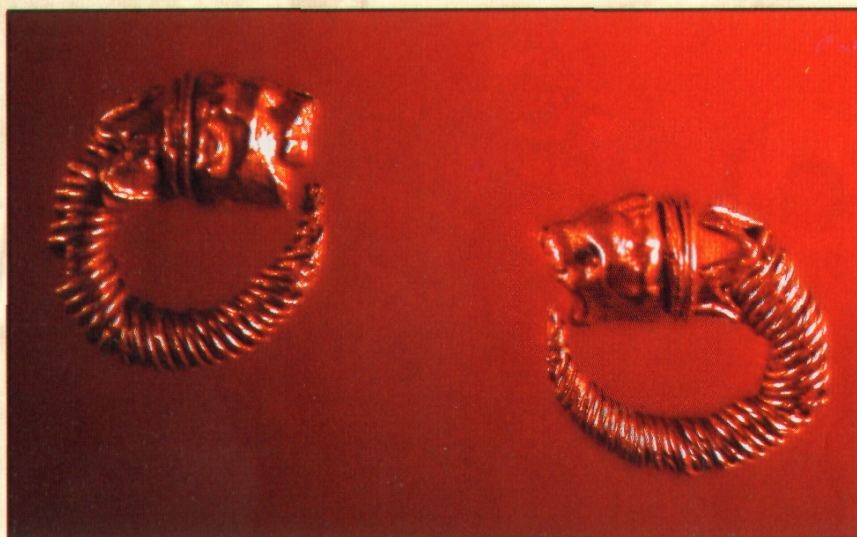
in mediaeval sources. This claim is justified because the mounds do number 100 (actually in the Isperih area they are much more), and also because at 289 m above sea level here rises the Great Mumjilarsk Mound, the highest point in the whole area.

Big and small, at first glance scattered in a disorderly fashion, the tumuli inspire a sense of eternity and grandeur. There is a pattern in their position in relation to each other, however, and researchers have come to the conclusion that particular groups of mounds are a mirror-image of some constellations – the Coma Beren-



Burial gifts. Western Mound Necropolis





Burial gifts. Eastern Mound Necropolis

ices, the Orion, the Plough and the Canis. The mounds that have been studied reveal burials of humans and animals, local and imported utensils, decorations and other burial gifts.

The necropolises are a result of the existence of the Getic capital – here, on the high hills around it, are the final dwellings of its rulers and noblemen.

Research has revealed so far

unknown facts about the funeral traditions of the Getae. The position of the gifts, the construction techniques used and the remains of mysterious rituals indicate a society that honoured their dead and deified their rulers.

The cluster of tumuli in the northern end of the Eastern necropolis has been entirely researched. Three stone mounds standing close to each other have semi-cylindrical vaults and were built at the end of the 4th – the beginning of the 3rd centuries B.C. The two smaller mounds – No12 and No13 in the southeastern part of the group are typical specimens of the common in Hellenistic times Macedonian style of tumuli – they are single-chamber with an anteroom and covered with a semi-cylindrical vault. The decoration is simple but the tombs rival the best specimens of the epoch in the workmanship of the masonry and their clear graceful lines. The tombs have identical plans and almost



The tomb under Mound № 13. Eastern Mound Necropolis

identical size except for the sliding doors, which open in different directions. There are no other such doors discovered on the Balkan Peninsula, but they have been known for a long time in Asia Minor – yet another fact to corroborate the numerous and varied ties



The tomb under Mound № 13 Eastern Mound Necropolis

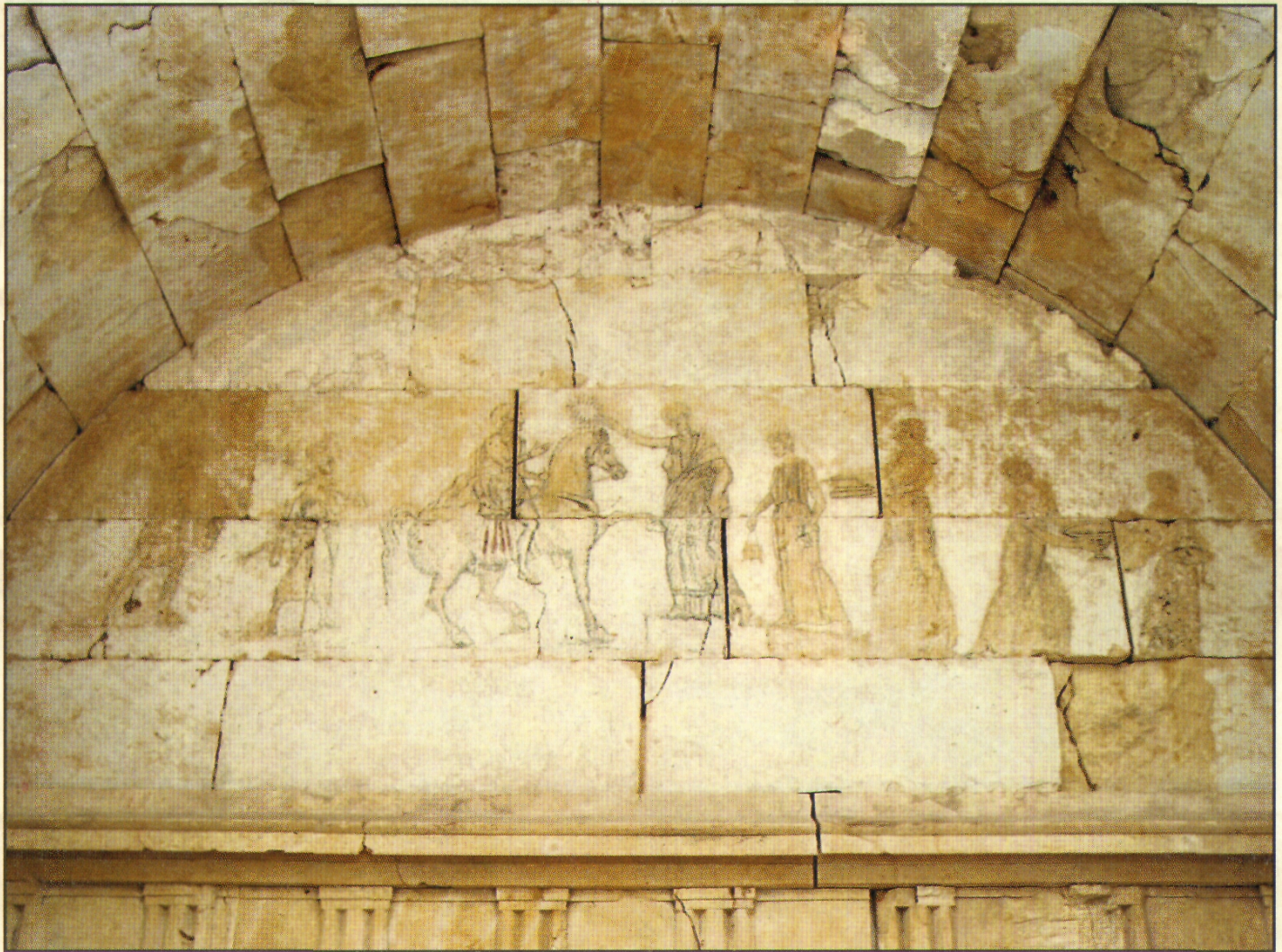
of the local tribes with far-off lands.

The most significant find on the site and the earliest to be discovered (1982) is the tomb under Ginina Hill, better known by the name of Sveshtari Tomb. It is a unique

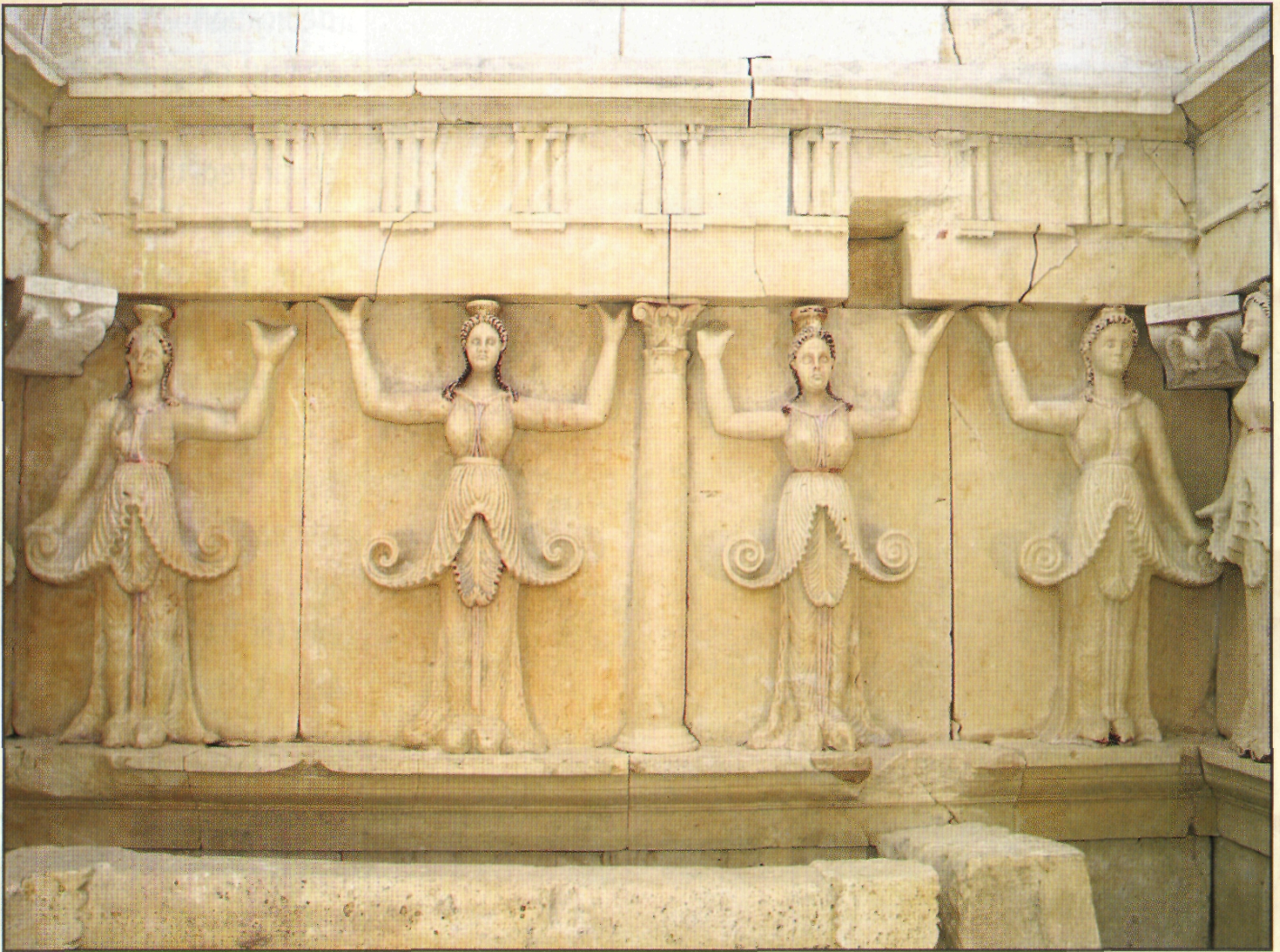


Sveshtari Tomb (4th –3rd centuries B. C.) Eastern Mound Necropolis

monument of Thracian burial architecture. The size of the tomb is impressive – it measures 7.5m in length, the width of the facade is 6.5 m and the height of the burial chamber (inside) – 4.45 m. The tomb is built of large lime-stone blocks and consists of a dromos



(corridor) and three chambers, each one separately domed. The decoration is in the style of the then current Hellenistic culture but expressive of the attitudes and beliefs of the Getae. The entrance positioned asymmetrically to the dome is decorated with rectangular frescoed columns and an epistyle with a frieze of ox heads, rosettes and garlands.



The ornamentation of the central (burial) chamber is extremely rich. Four Doric and one Corinthian columns support a frieze of triglyphs and metopes and between the columns stand ten high-relief female figures (caryatids) with arms raised above their heads. Above the cornice – in the lunette of the vault - there is a painted scene representing the



deification of the deceased ruler. A massive, ornamental stone door separated the last resting-place of the ruler from the eyes of the mortals. Another, humbler bed was designed for the best-loved wife, who accompanied the deceased in after-life and his favourite horses were laid in the side-chamber and at the door of the ante-chamber. Because of its remarkable architecture and splendid decoration the Sveshtary Tomb became a UNESCO monument in 1985.

'...the Getae who believe in their immortality' Herodotus informs concisely. Having experienced the greatness of the tomb, even the sceptically-minded contemporary accepts these words with no prejudice. The Getae did go beyond death through what they created.



THE SEVERE FATHER

Demir Baba (the Severe Father) is the most revered saint among the Alian (Kazalbash) inhabitants of North Bulgaria. His tomb is one of the most often visited places not only by the Alians but also by orthodox Muslims and, after the liberation from Ottoman rule



– by the Christians from the surrounding villages.

The reasons for this unusual practice are numerous and varied. To understand them we should go back in history to the background of unorthodox trends in Islam. Contemporary alians explain the name Kazalbash by the byname the Mohammedans gave to the founder of the Shiiti Islam – Ali. According to them, after a defeat at the hands of the prophet Mohammed, Ali, having sustained a head wound, walked away from the site of the battle. According to another tradition, Ali was simply wearing a red cap, but in either case his opponents shouted after him, 'Catch the Redhead' (Kazalbash in Turkish).

Actually, 'Kazalbash' was the name of the Turkic nomadic tribes in Eastern Iran where Shiiti Islam (Alianism) was the official religion during the Middle Ages. In later times the name was applied to the Muslims who professed Shiism.

The never-ending conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and Shiiti Iran caused the cruel persecution of the Alians in the areas bordering on Iran and of the Anatolian Aleviis. During the reign of Sultan Selim I (1467 –1520) many Alians were exiled to Northeast Bulgaria. In the meantime the new ideas of Suphism had spread and endured among the Aleviis in Iran. These ideas were incorporated in the philosophical, moral and ethical system of the mystic order founded by Haji Bektash Veli (15th century). The consecrated into the order were obliged to follow the ideals of social justice, equality of people before God, the struggle against evil and the establishment of goodwill and brotherhood among the people. Among the exiled Alians in Northeast Bulgaria and also among the janissaries, who on being discharged from service settled here, there were many followers of Bektashism.

There are transcripts of traditions telling about the valiant deeds of Haji Bektash Veli,

of Demir Baba and others among the elderly Alians even today. Demir Baba appears in the local folklore of the villages inhabited by Alians: Sevar, Ostrovo, Bisertsi, Madrevo, Sveshtari, Preslabtsi, Bradvari and others.

In 1952 researchers came across a handwritten life of Demir Baba in Osmanli Turkish, though containing many Arabic and Persian phrases, which was dated to 1716 – 1717. The life tells that Demir Baba was born in the time of Sultan Suleiman I (1520 – 1566) which coincides with the hypothetical dating of the building of the tomb – 1612 –1617.

It is a domed septangular structure with a rectangular ante-chamber and an entrance facing east. The location of the site is quite significant – it stands on a bend of the Krapinets canyon, next to a powerful karst spring. Curious facts came to light during the 1983 –1991 excavations in the courtyard and the surroundings of the tomb. The site proved to have been a holy place for the various tribes and peoples living here for over 2000 years before the tomb was built. It was raised on the site of an ancient Thracian sanctuary (6th – 2nd centuries A.D.). Part of the huge stone blocks of the sacrificial altar were built into the thick (1.2m – 1.5m) walls of the tomb. The Thracians worshipped the gods of the earth, water and underworld in their temple.

During the First and the Second Bulgarian States there was probably a Christian chapel here as witnessed by the brothers Skorpil, who, while first surveying the terrain at the end of the 19th century, discovered a large stone cross on the side of the hill. Unfortunately there was no trace left of it in later time.

After the Liberation and after the Balkan wars in particular, refugees from Aegean Thrace and North Dobruja settled in the area. The newly arrived Christian population whose cultural tradition bore the worshipping of holy water, were drawn to the tomb





and the adjacent springs, all the more so, as this place was the only source of abundant water in an otherwise arid area. The Christian settlers associated the site and its springs with St. Ilija and dedicated a feast in his honour on the 2nd August (old style)– St. Ilija's Day. Alban, Sunnite and Christian traditions interweave on a far more ancient basis that can be traced in contemporary religious practices. The belief that on St. Ilija's Day the holy place demands the loss of human life can directly be referred to the information in Herodotus about the human sacrifices of the Getae.

The tying of strips of clothing on tree branches, ritual ablution, stretching out on the rocks to absorb their strength and other magic acts are an echo of the far-off times when the Great Goddess Mother of all living things was worshipped and when, characteristically, on feast days her representation was washed and dressed as part of a special ritual. The custom of making an offering of a specially prepared meat dish in this place as an expression of gratitude for a successful cure or a means of taking a solemn vow is also a vestige of ancient practices. Demir Baba himself was described in his life as a victor over the dragon and a healer – in the tradition of St. George and some other more ancient heroes – dragon-slaying and health-giving deities honoured here thousands of years back.

The most popular legend about Demir Baba tells of an unprecedented drought when all plants withered and people and animals died of thirst. The afflicted turned for help to the saint and he thrust his hand into the very rock and made curative water gush forth from a spring. To commemorate the miracle people called the spring Besh Parmak – the Five Fingers and the local inhabitants believe in the healing properties of the water to this day.

Because of its remarkable architecture, state of preservation and natural environment Demir Baba Teke was declared a national monument of culture in the Official Gazette in 1927. After the establishment of the Sboryanovo Historical Cultural Reserve, the Isperih History Museum has provided the site with security control. They organize access for individual visitors and groups during the daytime and protection against vandalism and illegal action during the night.

Visitors to Demir Baba Teke are either believers – Alians, who come to worship on religious feasts or tourists, who come to see the monument out of curiosity or because they have special interests.

There have been no unpleasant incidents caused by ethnic or other differences among individual or group visitors, or religious intolerance on feast days. This is guaranteed by the long-standing tradition of holy places to inspire peace among the people and the Suphistic principle of equality of people before God.



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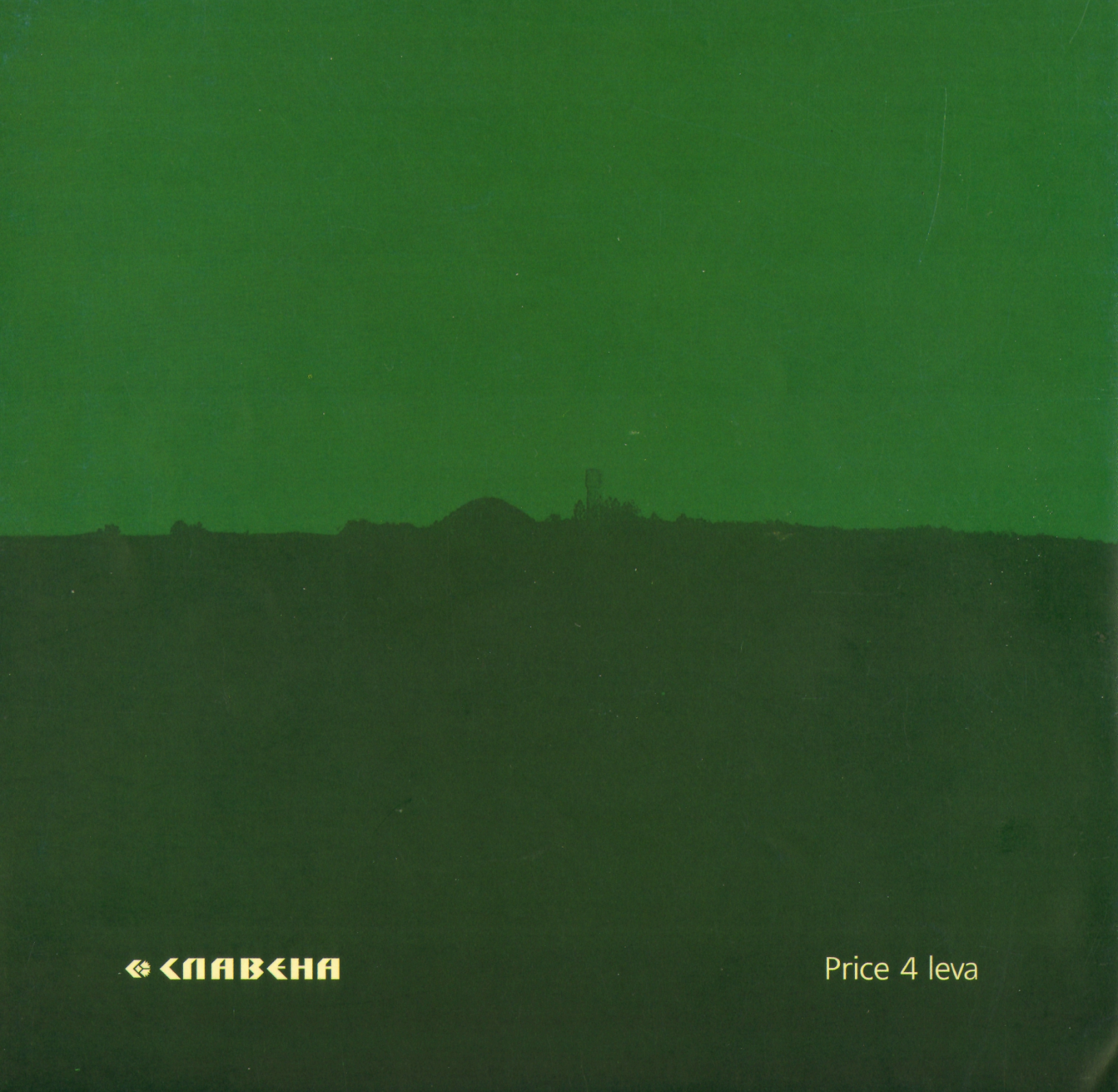
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